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ABSTRACT

Topics related to race and gender have begun appearing with increasing frequency in the adult education literature. The most prevalent trend in the literature is a focus on creating learning environments for diverse audiences, including appropriate strategies for teaching and learning and debate on whether separate approaches and/or special programs based on race and/or gender are needed. The intersection of gender, race, and class and their role in shaping how adult learners view learning and knowing is receiving increasing attention, and discussions of race and gender are being framed within the larger contexts of power structures and power relations. Among other gender- and race-related issues receiving increasing attention in the adult education literature are the following: how the field of adult education perpetuates racism and sexism, how adult education portrays women and gays/lesbians, how the role of women and African Americans can be reclaimed in the history of adult education; and the relationship between women and literacy. To date, topics related to race or multicultural issues have not received as much attention as topics related to gender. (Annotated lists of 22 print resources and 2 resource organizations concerned with issues of race and gender in adult education are included.) (MN)

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**Race and Gender in Adult Education
Trends and Issues Alerts**

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TRENDS AND ISSUES

ALERTS

by Susan Imel
1993

Race and Gender in Adult Education

Topics related to race and gender have begun appearing with increasing frequency in the adult education literature. Part of the growth in this literature base is due to adult educators' awareness of the need to address cultural diversity or inclusive approaches to education. However, a growing number of publications examine the relationship between adult education and "issues of prejudice, power, and privilege" (Hayes and Colin 1994, p. 1), bringing a critical perspective to bear not only on current practices but also on the field's theoretical foundations. Until recently, much of the literature on race and gender was reported in conference proceedings, giving it limited visibility. Although now available in more mainstream publications, the topics of race and gender are still not widely discussed within the field of adult education. Fortunately, enough adult educators are committed to developing a knowledge base on race and gender that the literature is developing rapidly.

The most prevalent trend in the literature is a focus on creating learning environments for diverse audiences, including appropriate strategies for teaching and learning (e.g., Colin and Preciphs 1991; Collard and Stalker 1991; Hayes 1989; Ross-Gordon 1994; and Tisdell 1993a). An issue related to teaching and learning is whether separate approaches are needed, that is, should special programs based on race and/or gender be created. Although some adult educators support distinct approaches (e.g., Carmack 1992), others are advocates for "restructuring learning environments to empower all kinds of learners" (Kerka 1993, [p. 2]).

The call to empower all kinds of learners should not be interpreted to mean adult educators are not sensitive to differences among learners. The intersection of gender, race, and class and their role in shaping how adults think about learning and knowing are being acknowledged (Caffarella 1992; Luttrell 1989). Discussions of race and gender are also being framed within the larger contexts of power structures and power relations (e.g., Stalker 1994; Tisdell 1993b).

How the field of adult education perpetuates racism and sexism is also being addressed. For example, Hayes and Colin (1994) edited a volume in which contributors not only examined a number of racist and sexist assumptions related to the field's knowledge base, graduate education, staff development, and professionalization but also provided examples and techniques to change racist and sexist practices.

Other trends include examining the adult education literature to uncover how it portrays women (Hayes and Smith 1994; Satter 1993) and gays/lesbians (Hill 1995); reclaiming the role of women (Hugo 1990) and African-Americans (see Section I of Sheared, Colin, and Guy 1993) in the history of adult education; and women and literacy (Carmack 1992; Fitzsimmons 1991). Topics related to race or multicultural issues have not received as much attention in the literature as those related to gender. However, publications such as Hemphill (1992), Ross-Gordon (1994), and the proceedings of the African American Adult Education Research Conferences (Guy, Colin, and Sheared 1994; Sheared, Colin, and Guy 1993) are

helping to fill gaps in the database. Further information about race and gender in adult education can be obtained by consulting the resources and organizations listed here.

Print Resources

Caffarella, R. S. *Psychosocial Development of Women: Linkages to Teaching and Leadership in Adult Education. Information Series No. 350.* Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1992. (ED 354 109)

Three themes emerge from this review of female developmental models and studies: the importance of relationships, the diverse and nonlinear patterns of women's lives, and issues of intimacy and identity. Examples of the use of these themes in the practice of teaching adults and developing women as leaders are provided.

Carmack, N. A. "Women and Illiteracy: The Need for Gender Specific Programming in Literacy Education." *Adult Basic Education* 2, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 176-194.

Makes recommendations for gender-specific programming based on theoretical formulations for adult learning that focus on the mental construction of experience as it relates to emancipatory learning.

Colin, S. A. J., III, and Preciphs, T. K. "Perceptual Patterns and the Learning Environment: Confronting White Racism." In *Creating Environments for Effective Adult Learning, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, edited by R. Hiemstra, no. 50 (Summer 1991): 61-70.

Suggests that rather than overtly confronting racism, adult educators focus on safe or nonthreatening issues such as low socioeconomic status, motivation, and participation.

Collard, S., and Stalker, J. "Women's Trouble: Women, Gender, and the Learning Environment." In *Creating Environments for Effective Adult Learning, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, edited by R. Hiemstra, no. 50 (Summer 1991): 71-81.

Examines how institutional settings both create and mirror a learning environment that devalues and disempowers women learners.

Fitzsimmons, K. A. "African-American Women Who Persist in Literacy Programs." *Urban Review* 23, no. 4 (1991): 231-250.

Reports on a study that investigated the characteristics of African-American women who persist in literacy programs; all participants cited their own determination as an essential and possibly the most important factor in their persistence.

Guy, T. C.; Colin, S. A. J., III; and Sheared, V., eds. *Afri-centrism—Perspective or Paradigm? Implications for Adult Education. Proceedings of the African American Adult Education Research Pre-Conference.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee, May 1994.

Contains 13 papers covering issues related to curriculum, community/employment, and institutions.

Hayes, E. "Insights from Women's Experiences for Teaching and Learning." In *Effective Teaching Styles, New Directions for Continuing Education*, edited by E. Hayes, no. 43 (Fall 1989): 55-66.

Discusses elements of an alternative approach to teaching—*feminist pedagogy*—that is based on new understandings of women's experiences and proposes its application in adult education.

Hayes, E., and Colin, S. A. J., III, eds. *Confronting Racism and Sexism, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no. 61 (Spring 1994).

An edited volume designed to enable adult educators to recognize the existence and consequences of racism and sexism in their own practice.

Hayes, E., and Smith, L. "Women and Adult Education: An Analysis of Perspectives in Major Journals." *Adult Education Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 201-221.

Qualitative content analysis of 112 articles in adult education journals identified five dominant perspectives of women as adult learners, deficient, coping with new social roles, marginalized, and collaborative learners. Women as feminist is an emerging sixth perspective.

Hemphill, D. F. "Thinking Hard about Culture in Adult Education: Not a Trivial Pursuit." *Adult Learning* 3, no. 7 (May 1992): 8-12.

Argues that adult educators should identify their perspective on diversity—deficit/assimilation, multicultural, or empowerment—and suggests ways to explore culture in practice.

Hill, R. J. "Gay Discourse in Adult Education: A Critical Review." *Adult Education Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 142-158.

Explores the dual emancipatory and oppressive roles that adult education plays within the gay and lesbian community, demonstrating that mainstream adult education reproduces heterocentric assumptions, social relations, and beliefs, at the expense of gay resistance discourse.

Hugo, J. M. "Adult Education History and the Issue of Gender: Toward a Different History of Adult Education in America." *Adult Education Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (Fall 1990): 1-16.

Argues for the inclusion of gender as a category of historical analysis by comparing the visibility of women in the historical research literature and identifying mechanisms that fostered women's invisibilities in adult education histories.

Kerka, S. *Women, Human Development, and Learning. ERIC Digest No. 139*. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1993. (ED 358 379)

Examines theories of human development as they relate to adult education, concluding that there is a need for multiple models that expand the definition of adulthood to include those who have been missing in traditional theories.

Luttrell, W. "Working-Class Women's Ways of Knowing: Effects of Gender, Race, and Class." *Sociology of Education* 62 (1989): 33-46.

Describes and analyzes how African-American and white working-class women define and claim knowledge. The women's perspectives challenge feminist analyses that have identified a single or universal mode of knowing for women.

Ross-Gordon, J. M. "Toward a Critical Multicultural Pedagogy for Adult Education." In *Proceedings of the 35th Annual Adult Education Research Conference*, edited by M. Hyams, J. Armstrong, and E. Anderson. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, May 1994.

Identifies a number of principles for teaching and learning based on a review of literature on multicultural education and related critical pedagogies.

Satterm, L. L. "Adult Education and Feminist Phase Theory: Practicing What We Teach." In *Proceedings of the 12th Annual Midwest Research-to-Practice Conference*, edited by K. Freer and G. Dean. Columbus: The Ohio State University, October 1993. (ED 362 663)

Uses Tetreault's feminist phase theory (i.e., the evolutionary process of gender inclusion in academic settings) to examine publications in adult education, assess feminist impact, and place adult education gender-related literature in a theoretical framework.

Sheared, V.; Colin, S. A. J., III; and Guy, T. C. *African American Adult Education Research Proceedings: A Link for Community Development and Empowerment*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University, May 1993.

Contains 16 papers divided into four sections: African American Adult Education History, Policy Issues, Womanist Perspective, and Forming Linkages through Culturally Contextualized Education Curricula.

Spendiff, A. "Learning Brings Us Together: The Meaning of Feminist Adult Education." In *Working and Learning Together for Change*, edited by C. Biott and J. Nias. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1992.

Author uses her personal experiences to describe how she is trying to place women and the experience of women centrally on the adult education agenda.

Stalker, J. "Discourse, Power Relations and Male Bias: Reframing the Field." In *Proceedings of the 35th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings*, edited by M. Hyams, J. Armstrong, and E. Anderson. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, May 1994.

Uses both feminist and adult education literature to create a framework that can be used to examine the adult education literature and research in terms of androcentricity (male centeredness.)

Taylor, K., and Marienau, C., eds. *Learning Environments for Women's Adult Development, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no. 65 (Spring 1995).

An edited volume designed to help create learning environments that are more supportive of recent women in their ongoing development.

Tisdell, E. J. "Feminism and Adult Learning: Power, Pedagogy, and Praxis." In *An Update on Adult Learning Theory, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, edited by S. Merriam, no. 57 (Spring 1993a): 91-103.

Reviews two common strands of feminist pedagogy—the liberatory and gender models—and discusses implications for practice and theory building in adult education.

Tisdell, E. J. "Interlocking Systems of Power, Privilege, and Oppression in Adult Higher Education Classes." *Adult Education Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (Summer 1993b): 203-226.

Reports on results of a case study that was guided by a feminist-materialist theoretical framework and that examined how power relationship based predominately on gender but including race, class, and age were manifested in adult higher education students.

Resource Organizations

American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, Unit on Women's Issues, Status and Education, 1200 19th Street, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 429-5131.

Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, 47 Main Street, Toronto, Ontario M4E 1V6; (416) 699-1909.

National Alliance of African American Adult Educators, c/o Dr. Scipio A. J. Colin III, Department of Adult and Community College Education, Box 7801, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695-7801.

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